DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 366 590 SP 035 016

AUTHOR Bloodsworth, Gaston
TITLE Rural Education and the Urban Reform Movement.
PUB DATE [93]
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Cultural Awareness; *Curriculum Design; *Educational Practices; Elementary Secondary Education; *Rural Education; *Rural Schools; *Rural Urban Differences; *Student Characteristics; Teacher Education Programs; Urban Education
IDENTIFIERS Diversity (Student); *Reform Efforts

ABSTRACT

There are major differences between rural and urban education, yet most educational reform efforts have been heavily urban oriented. While reform movements of the 1980s may have benefited urban schools, they have only added to the problems of rural education. Some of the conditions often associated with rural schools are: poverty, reform generated problems stemming from the promotion of national standards and assessments, failure to consider basic inequities among schools, an unwillingness on the part of rural students to seek individual recognition or to engage in individual competition, and the diversity of cultures within rural areas. It is suggested that in order to improve rural education the unique needs of rural schools and the characteristics of rural students must be understood and addressed. Teacher education programs must include rural education as a legitimate entity in curricular studies and pedagogical approaches; educational textbooks need to distinguish between rural and urban education; multicultural education programs should address the diversity found in rural areas; and rural education must be based on academically demanding rural, not urban standards. (LL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 366 590

RURAL EDUCATION AND THE URBAN REFORM MOVEMENT

GASTON BLOODSWORTH, ED.D.
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA - AIKEN

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

G. Bloodsworth

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

SP035016

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

RURAL EDUCATION AND THE URBAN REFORM MOVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Without question, there are major differences between rural and urban education. Yet most everything written concerning teacher education addresses education as if it were urban with some exceptions labeled rural. Far too often our education textbooks are written in this rather cavalier manner with urban education being the standard by which things are done, and rural education, if mentioned at all, as being somewhat of an exception to the norms. Few even address the unique needs of rural schools and the learning characteristics of rural students.

This is probably due to the fact that the history of American education and educational reform has been primarily an urban one (Kaestle, 1990). School reforms of the mid 19th century were brought on not by rural needs, but by the Industrial Revolution. Since that time urban needs have generated most of the educational reforms up to the present time. Most educational research from the 1950's on has been heavily urban oriented and has dealt with major urban problems -- often minorities and the inner city.

Consequently, over the years rural education has become a step-child despite the fact that most Americans have an idealistic or romantic tie to rural America. But there is evidence that rural education is beginning to receive some of the attention it deserves

(Potterfield and Pace, 1992).

RURAL POVERTY

There is justifiable need for such attention. Contrary to widely held beliefs, poverty is not limited to the inner cities nor does it follow racial boundaries. The majority of poor people still live in small towns and rural America (Reed and Sautter, 1990). Typically, rural areas have 30 percent of the farm poulation and 24 percent of the nonfarm population living in poverty (Rodgers and Burge, 1992). Unfortunately, low socio-economic levels are closely related to poor academic achievement. But most educational research dealing with this problem is limited to urban areas, yet the population of rural at-risk students is extremely high with the majority of unserved and underserved children living in these areas (Helge, 1988).

Although economic underdevelopment is not an accurate description of the economic plight of all rural areas and schools, it is accurate for hundreds of areas across the country (DeYoung, 1987). There are over 2.2 million children attending 2,750 rural school districts that chronically suffer from severe "poorness" (Pepple, et al, 1990). Pepple further reports that of all the school districts in all fifty states, 74 percent are small or very small, 59 percent are rural, 51 percent are both small and rural, and 14 percent are small, rural, and poor.

REFORM GENERATED PROBLEMS

While the reform movements of the 1980's may have benefited

urban schools, they have only added to the problems of the rural schools (Cole, 1988). Since most movements were in the direction of national standards and were urban oriented, they often failed to recognize or acknowledge the uniqueness of rural education. Seldom was rural education treated as an educational entity with specific needs, but rather as a troblesome area that had to be brought up to the idealistic urban standards.

Far too often the battle in rural schools is simply to survive, not to achieve supremacy (Cole). As the reform movements bring about more standardization and higher standards, the rural schools get caught in the squeeze. New courses or areas may have to be added to the curriculum. But many rural schools cannot afford to hire new teachers, or may not be able to compete for the properly certified teachers with wealthier or more conveniently located schools. As a result, teachers may end up teaching more than one area, and more than likely will not be certified in some of the areas. In some cases uncertified degree holders are allowed to teach under special provisions that eventually lead to certification.

This is exactly what is going to be done in South Carolina, but only in rural school districts that are having trouble keeping teachers. Consideration is not being given to the cause of the large turnovers, but only to having someone in the classroom. By law, rural school districts have to meet the same standards as urban ones, yet they are not consistently being provided the opportunity to have the same quality certified teachers. Rural areas requiring the most assistance to meet state mandates are now allowed to hire

uncertified and untrained personnel as teacher. In effect, standards are being raised, but the means for obtaining them are being reduced. One wonders what message this sends to the students and parents in these areas. Are they not worthy of qualified teachers and a quality education?

Often times reform brings about other changes that affect finances (Forbes, 1990). The state may mandate changes or require certain physical facilities, but not give sufficient funding to bring them about. As Cole points out, in small and rural districts, if something is gained, something else has to give. Thus it becomes harder to meet new requirements because at some point there is little if anything that can be cut or exchanged. Forbes believes these school districts should be given the flexibility to respond to the spirit of the law rather than the letter. Clearly, policy decisions need to be based on rural needs and realities rather than in an urban or bureaucratic context.

O'Neil (1993) points out that issues such as class size, outmoded facilities, and inequitable financing are currently on the back burner as some race forward with plans to establish standards and tests. Unfortunately, most everything to do with rural education is also on the back burner as the urban dominated reform movement moves forward. As it is with students, it is with schools; to treat all the same as a means of being fair, is to treat some unfairly.

All too often those promoting national standards and assessments do not consider rural schools or basic inequities among schools. Means of helping urban at-risk students meet new

and higher standards are addressed in numerous studies (See, for example, Payzant and Wolf, 1993). But little is written concerning the unique learning characteristics of rural students, or means of helping them meet the new standards other than through the same methods used with urban students. Unique characteristics of rural students and rural schools have not often been addressed except in specific rural education journals. And much of the scholarship on rural education is looked upon by many educators as somewhat unsophisticated when compared to mainstream educational journals (DeYoung). Fortunately, this is beginning to change as more research dealing with rural education is making its way into mainstream journals.

RURAL LEARNING CHARACTERISTICS

But the research is still limited and far too often those making curricular decisions are unaware of the difference in rural and urban learning styles. The unique learning characteristics of rural students have not been given proper consideration. Rural students are global learners who do not seek individual recognition and do not like individual competition. They like information given to them orally and they have a perception of learning as a social experience. Also, they have trouble with arbitrarily set time frames and have a tendency toward subjective conclusions. They have feelings of powerlessness concerning events and the environment (Potterfield and Pace). Clearly, they are not at home in the typical urban or urban influenced classroom that places so much emphasis on individual performance and achievement. Yet

those pedagogical approaches that work well in rural situations will work equally well in urban, and especially in inner city and disadvantaged situations. But it is the urban model, not the rural one that is being presented as the standard of correctness by most educators and almost all reformers.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Even though multicultural education and diversity are major issues in education, they are almost always urban oriented. The diversity of cultures within rural areas is commonly overlooked. Often there is more diversity within a given rural area than there is between rural and urban areas (Pepple). Rural America is not homogeneous and there are many minorities that have never received due recognition (Fitzgerald and Bloodsworth, 1993). Educational reform has stressed the importance of multiculturalism, but unfortunately has placed the primary empahsis on urban groups. When cultural diversity is not properly understood or known, divisiveness rather than understanding can result. This may well be a factor in the multicultural approach not being as effective as desired in many teacher training programs.

Oftentimes things are not as they seem. Sullivan and Miller (1990) described a population of urban Appalachians living in Cincinnati. They were tied by socioeconomic factors such as educational attainment, occupational status, income, and housing. While they were living in an urban area, they were not integrated into it and had much closer ties with their Appalachian culture. In dealing with these people, labeled "the Invisible Minority", one

is dealing with the rural Appalachian culture rather than an urban one. It raises the question of how many other rural "Invisible Minorities" exist in urban areas. It also adds emphasis to the fact that all teachers, regardless of where they are teaching, must be aware of different learning styles and characteristics, and that multicultural education and culrural diversity are far more complex than they may appear on the surface.

CONCLUSION

If true educational reform is to take place, serious consideration must be given to rural education. It differs from urban education and cannot be measured with the urban yardstick. The needs of rural schools and the learning characteristics of rural students have to be understood and addressed.

Colleges of Education are in a position to make major contributions by including rural education as a legitimate entity in their curricular studies and teaching the proper pedagogy for addressing the learning characteristics of rural students. And authors of educational textbooks must begin to make a distinction between rural and urban education and stop writing about education only in terms of urban education. Multicultural education programs must also address the diversity found in rural areas. It must be understood that rural students, even when placed in an urban environment, are still rural learners.

If improvements are to be made in rural education, they must be based on rural education. We cannot improve it by applying urban standards. Rural education is not the step-child. It has

only been assigned that role by educators. It is time for us to recognize it for what it is: an area of education that is just as legitimate as, but quite different from urban education. When this is done, rural education can become a major participant in successful and positive educational reform. But reform that is based on rural standards, not urban standards. And these standards must be just as demanding academically as are the urban standards. The product of both should be the same: well educated students. Anything less than that is not acceptable.

REFERENCES

Cole, B. (1988). Teaching in a time machine: The make do mentality in small-town schools. Phi Delta Kappan. 70 (10) 139-144.

DeYoung, A.J. (1987). The status of rural education research: An integrated review and commentary. Review of Educational Research. 57 (2) 123-148.

Fitzgerald, D.F., & Bloodsworth, J.G. (1993). Using multicultural education to enhance the self-worth of rural at-risk students. National Rural Education And Rural Special Education Symposium. 13 (1) 1-9.

Forbes, R.H. (1990). Rural education and the reform movement. Education Digest. 55 (1) 236.

Helge, D. (1988). Serving at-risk populations in rural America. Teaching Exceptional Chiildren. 20 16-18.

Kaestle, C.F. (1990). The public schools and the public mood. American Heritage. 41 (1) 66-81.

O'Neil, J. (1993). Can National Standards Make A Difference? Educational Leadership. 50 (5) 4-8.

Pepple, J.D., Law, A.L., & Kallembach, S.C. (1990). A vision of rural education for 2001. Educational Horizons. 69 (3) 50-58.

Potterfield, J.E., & Pace, M.B. (1992). Learning style, culture and popular instructional methods. SERATE Journal. 1 (1) 40-42.

Payzant, T. & Wolf, D. (1993). Piloting pacesetter: Helping at-risk students meet high standards. Educational Leadership. 50 (5) 42-45.

Reed, S., & Sautter, E.C. (1990). Children of poverty. Phi Delta Kappan. 71 (10) K1-K12.

Rodgers, E.M., & Burge, R.J. (1992). Social changes in rural societies. 2nd ed. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Sullivan, M., & Miller, D. (1990). Cincinnati's urban appalachian council and appalachian idenity. Harvard Educational Review. 60 (1) 106-124.